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ABSTRACT

Getting into print is a matter of writing something that someone else wants to read, and writing it so clearly that it can be read easily and effectively. Some aspiring young authors think that getting published is mainly a matter of knowing the editor. Rather than knowing the editor, you should first know your purpose in writing. Second, know your intended audience. Third, know appropriate publications. The criteria by which manuscripts are evaluated are usually not difficult to discover. Check the information in a journal's masthead or somewhere in the vicinity of its table of contents. General criteria almost always echo the audience being served--or that is the intent of the criteria. Do not send a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time. Cover letters usually don't do any harm, but they probably don't do much good either. If a cover letter is needed to explain some circumstance that is not obvious in the manuscript, then use a cover letter. Otherwise, a manuscript either stands on its own or it doesn't. The format of the paper should follow the requirements of the journal to which it is being submitted. If a manuscript is accepted for publication, it is not uncommon for a year to pass between the time it is sent and the time it appears in print. (WR)

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GETTING YOUR IDEAS INTO PRINT

Presented at a conference
of the Western College Reading Association
Oakland, California
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At the risk of oversimplifying and sounding flip, let me assure you that getting into print is a matter of writing something that someone else wants to read, and writing it so clearly that it can be read easily and effectively. With patience, sufficient postage, and a comprehensive index of journals, magazines, newsletters, and the like, publication will almost surely follow.

Obviously, that advice is simple to verbalize, but most demanding and difficult to accept and follow. If you cannot master all the elements of the requirement, cut from the rear: So you can't write too effectively, write clearly. So your writing isn't clear and easy, maybe you'll luck into an editorial staff that will rewrite

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for you. (Swallow the ego; the path to publication is littered with wounded egos.)

But you cannot cut the first half of that advice if you want to get published. You must write something that someone else wants to read--indeed needs to read.

In assessing the remarks that follow, keep in mind that there are variations from publisher to publisher, editor to editor. There are very crucial differences, for instance, between commercial and non-commercial publications, as far as authors and editors are concerned, and I assume that you can recognize for yourself at least some of the most obvious differences. Manuscript in hand, or idea for one in your head, your "sales" approach to a commercial textbook publisher should not be the same as your approach to a professional journals, for instance. I can speak here with complete accuracy only from my own editorial office. On the other hand, practices and policies within my present office are not atypical, overall, and where there is great deviation, I will try to remember to point out that fact.

Neither is what I say here to be interpreted as comprehensive and absolute. Getting your ideas into print is a topic that literally has produced volumes. I hope simply to touch on a few matters that will be helpful to you.

Editor's Point of View

Some aspiring authors think that getting published is mainly a matter of knowing an editor. Generally speaking, little could be further from the truth. While no editor has been known to neglect a grandmother in the process of carrying out his editorial responsibilities,

it is probably only because circumstances have never arisen in which an editor has found it necessary to do so. Given editorial responsibility and familial relationship to choose from, grandma would go.

Rather than knowing the editor, I would urge you first to know your purpose in writing. Second, know your intended audience. Third, know appropriate publications. And, those three requirements come in close order. What do you want to accomplish with the manuscript? Who are the people you want to reach, what do they know, how can you best communicate with them? Which publication is most likely to help you reach them?

Contrary to a lurking, unspoken suspicion, an editor does not exist to keep you out of print. In fact, just the opposite is true. The editor is the point of contact between author and audience, and in that capacity his first and foremost responsibility is to the audience--to the readers of the publication he edits. What best serves them, best suits him. That is an important point for the potential author to remember. His own interests as author are entirely secondary to the interests of the audience, and the interests of the audience are the only interest of the editor. George Schick makes this point quite strongly in an article in the Journal of Reading, "Author and Editor: Catechism and Strategies," October 1972.

Now, there is such a thing as "personality editing," and to some extent every editor shapes a publication and thus to some extent influences both definition of audience and what is to be expected of potential contributors to that publication. The Saturday Review of the forties, fifties and sixties was so much Norman Cousins that the magazine became something else altogether when he pulled out two or

three years ago. In fact, it folded, although factors in the demise went beyond his "editorial personality." Playboy is another obvious example of a publication that is apparently tied inextricably to its creator's personality and editorial outlook--or at least that is what the Playboy image-managers would have us believe.

But, such "personality editing" is the exception. The editor as personality fades in a publication as blandly commercial as Family Circle or Better Homes and Gardens, and in educational journals, the editor's personality is usually all but literally non-existent. Some professional journals are edited essentially by committee. I might add that in educational journals, already basically intolerant of undue personal editorial bias, toleration of an editor's personal biases quite likely goes down still further as his pay goes up. That is, the editor who is being paid off only or mostly in prestige, service and influence can be expected to exercise his personal biases more than the editor who is a fully paid hired hand. You can't eat prestige, service and influence, and the volunteer editor needs some source of satisfaction to sustain him. If he can refrain from getting it through the exercise, conscious or unconscious, of his personal preferences, hang on to him as an editor, for you have some kind of saint enshrined there. The moment an editor becomes the employee of a sponsoring organization, the moment a group pays him a living wage, the less likely any toleration of his very human tendency to let the publication reflect unduly his own personal biases.

How, then, does each of these three different editor-types determine or interpret his audience? The personality editor has the easiest task. He says, "This is what I'm interested in, and whatever

audience my publication draws will necessarily--by definition and free choice--be interested in the same things." The commercial editor will determine his audience largely by advertising revenue and the rules of the marketplace. The educational editor will serve that audience that has already been defined by the membership and the goals of his sponsoring organization. He is their hired hand.

By the way, there is probably a bit of each type operative within every editor. The distinctions drawn here are for illustration of a point. It is rare to find an editor who fits solely and completely into only one of those types.

Let me turn from those general--and again oversimplified--distinctions to some of the more specific criteria and procedures that I myself hold and follow as an editor. I suspect many other journal editors in education follow similar practices.

There is a belief among writers that the chances are great that a manuscript will rarely be read by the editor to whom you have sent it and who is eventually responsible for deciding on acceptance, rejection or modification of every manuscript that arrives in his office. There is a belief that most manuscripts are picked over and sorted out by underpaid hirelings or "pretty young things" before those manuscripts are routed to the editor.

Perhaps there is some validity to the belief, especially if it is directed toward huge commercial magazines or professional journals staffed by overworked volunteers who try to squeeze in editing between running graduate seminars and the rest of their heavy faculty commitments. However, in educational publishing, even that harassed and poorly supported volunteer is likely to read every manuscript that comes along.

Speaking for myself, not only do I read every manuscript that comes our way; I guarantee that about 90 to 95 percent of those manuscripts will also be read by at least two advisors from the professional field --peers or colleagues of the contributor solicited from my office. If the manuscript is then accepted and published, it will almost always, in our operation, have been read or worked on by at least six people at our end of the line before it goes to the printer.

In all this, some of us probably outdo our editorial colleagues from other journals, but those of us who do so are also probably fortunate in being more fully staffed than the others. That is, we are given more resources to work with than others are given in their offices.

The criteria by which manuscripts are evaluated are usually not difficult to discover. We ourselves publish an author's guide, and it is not unusual for a publication to do so, often within the front matter of the journal itself. Check the information in a journal's masthead,or somewhere in the vicinity of its table of contents, or wherever that fine print is that you normally ignore. General criteria almost always echo the audience being served--or that is the intent of the criteria, at any rate. Within the house, we refine those criteria to cover such matters as style, clarity, editorial convention, and the like, and we ask our reviewers to consider such finer concerns.

Our incoming manuscripts, by the way, are reviewed anonymously by our editorial advisors, although I am not sure that is true of most publications. Only my staff and I know who has written a manuscript that is out to the advisory board for review. Similarly, manuscript authors are not normally told which of the advisors have reviewed their

particular manuscripts. We maintain this anonymity so that every manuscript can be judged as much as possible on its own merits--not on the fame or reputation (or lack of them) of its author.

Some people wonder if we, or other journals, follow any quota systems, either in deciding on contents or authors. Some publications do, some do not. We do not, really, although we do seek representation across the broad range of interests, approaches and levels within the field of reading. As editor, I like to be sure that all professional persuasions have their turns at the rostrum, and in that desire I simply reflect the official policy and the major intent of the organization for which I work. However, rarely has a top quality manuscript been rejected only because another manuscript has been accepted that is similar to it. If both are top quality, we will probably try to allow a time lapse between the appearance of one and the other. I repeat <u>rarely</u>. Some topics turn out to be extremely popular and we cannot--should not--fill an issue with six or seven repetitions of the same message, no matter how good the manuscripts. The past year brought me a rash of manuscripts about word lists, for instance. I do not think our readers would welcome two or three word list articles every month, norwould a dosage of two or three per month fairly reflect needs and drives within the profession.

We also do not set quotas among authors--by level of assignment or background or degree or geographical location or whether or not they are well-known. Again, wide representation is our goal, but we simply do not hear from certain corners often enough, so both supply and demand play their separate roles in determing what finally appears in print.

Most of what I hear from classroom teachers and community college people, to name two examples, unfortunately does not come in the form of mansucripts--which we need--but in complaints that we don't publish enough articles from classroom teachers or articles for community college personnel. And, adult reading is an area that apparently exists in name and need only, judging by the almost zero number of manuscripts we receive in that area.

There are economic limitations, by the way, on what can be published, and they loom large for some editors. There are only so many pages available per volume. Again, my office has been more fortunate than some--with great flexibilityin number of pages (or budget percentages) allocated to the journals. Furthermore, our flow of incoming manuscripts and our acceptance/rejection rates have remained rather steady. So far, every manuscript unanimously recommended for publication has been published--eventually--even the word list manuscripts I used as an example earlier. I cannot tell you if similar circumstances hold true for other journals.

Writer's Point of View

Let me turn, now, from the editor's point of view and try to see things from the potential author's point of view. So you think you have written something that someone else will want to read. You even have an idea of who that someone is; you've identified an audience, in other words. Next step: Where to send the manuscript?

Certainly it is useful to have a particular publication in mind when you write. Indeed, various publications, as we have implied, hold various expectations and requirements in format, needs and audience. However, if you are really interested in publishing, you will consult

any of the several reference lists available to you. Most new writers are amazed to learn how many different outlets are available to them. See Literary Marketplace, Ulrich's Guide to Periodicals, Writer's Market, The Writer, Ayers' Standard Rate and Data, or one of the indexes to educational publishing. We ourselves publish three journals, almost every group like the Western College Reading Association has at least one publication, and there are at least thirty or forty state journals and newsletters in reading. They vary in quality, but almost all of them deserve more recognition that they receive.

However, one caution! Do not--do not--send a manuscript to more than one publication at a time. There is nothing so infuriating to an editorial staff--every staff is overworked--as to learn that a manuscript on which they have spent hours of time has already been accepted for another publication. Not only does the practice waste our staff time; it jeopardizes our copyright attempts to protect contributors themselves from misure of the materials they publish through our journals.

Should you send a cover letter with your manuscript? Usually, it doesn't do any harm, but it probably doesn't do much good. If a cover letter is needed to explain some circumstance that is not obvious in the manuscript, okay, use a cover letter. Otherwise, you might as well save the stationery. A manuscript either stands on its own or it doesn't. The journal readers will not see any cover letter if the article is eventually published. Why inflict one on the editor, who is supposed to be at least as smart as most of the journal readers?

What about all those "Mickey Mouse" requirements--typed copy, double spaced, three copies, return envelope, etc.? Do follow

them closely. There are reasons for them. We ask for three copies of a manuscript, for instance, so we can keep one in the office for safety and consideration while the other two are circulating among advisors. We don't want Dittoed copies because they are usually difficult to read and all but impossible to reproduce well on the photocopier if we need extra copies in processing the manuscript. I distrust mimeographed copies because I suspect the author either has not cared enough to shape a manuscript toward my publication, or has run off enough copies to send them simultaneously to everyone in the world.

Some few authors are still copyrighting their materials before they send them to an editor. Perhaps unless you are dealing with a shyster outfit (shysterism is usually obvious to all but the hopelessly naive), the practice of copyrighting your own material before sending it to an editor is a waste of your time and money. Of the editors you are likely to deal with, those whose publications are commonly recognized as legitimate in the field, none has ever stolen a manuscript, or even an idea from a writer. We would be cutting our own throats to do so. When I see a manuscript with a copyright notice on it, I immediately wonder if it has been published--and thus copyrighted--in some other journals, so the practice has somewhat of a reverse effect on me, though not a damning one.

Should you write a letter of query to the editor before you send in the manuscript? A query letter might help, but probably will not help very much if you are talking simply about an article manuscript. If the editor probably receives a huge number of ideas and manuscripts, yes, a query can save him and you time and effort. However, speaking from my own office, we almost routinely answer query letters with a

statement that all manuscripts are welcome, that each is judged on its own merits, and that topic--which is about all that a query letter suggests--is not the sole criterion by which manuscripts are evaluated. With a small staff and a heavy workload, we unfortunately are not now geared to work directly with an author in developing a topic. Some editorial offices are geared to do so, but I don't know of any in educational publishing.

Will my being a member of an organization help or hinder my chances at publication in that organization's journals? Usually, membership neither helps nor hinders your chances at publication; it is essentially irrelevant to those chances. It might be nice but it is completely unnecessary to tell me, for instance, that you have been a member of the International Reading Association (my employer) for twenty years and have read our journals slavishly those many years. For the how-many-eth time, a manuscript stands on its own merits, and paying your dues to the sponsoring organization is definitely not one of those merits--at least in the offices I know anything about. The only time I have checked a membership list is to find someone's address or to send out a randomized questionnaire. In fact, a computer did the randomizing job for us, and I did not even see the list.

Why the long wait for an editorial decision? It takes time for a manuscript to be reviewed. We pride ourselves on efficiency, but you are extremely fortunate to hear even from us within two weeks. Two months is closer to the norm, and it is not unusual for consideration of a manuscript to stretch into three to six months. If a manuscript is accepted for publication, it is not uncommon for a year to have passed from your sending the manuscript to its appearance in print.

Production alone takes us about three months, and from scheduling through press run, we are often working directly on four different monthly issues simultaneously. With two journals to produce, that means we can be working at one time on eight different issues in various stages of production. Time magazine can come out with a new report two or three days after the event, newspapers within an hour, TV and radio simultaneously, but all of that is made possible through the use of several hundred times as many staff members as are available to most education editors.

As a contributor, rather than try to beat the lag problem by dual submission of your manuscript, try George Schick's method (ibid.): Keep one manuscript in some editor's office, while a second one is being typed for mailing from your office, and a third is in outline or rough draft.

Finally, let me comment on the desire of smaller organizations and special interest groups to have their own publications. I am sure the desire springs from a feeling of being lost, or impersonality in a larger group. We don't want to be lost in the shuffle, we don't want to be pushed around, we want to be heard. I think those desires are healthy ones, generally, so I tend at least to sympathize with the people who hold them.

But my deepest sympathy does to the editors who are stuck with the job of meeting those desires and ambitions. There is an inescapable tradeoff, given present print technology and cost--a tradeoff between budget and capacity to serve. It is an economic fact of life that the smaller the circulation, the higher the unit cost of the publication, and the curve is close to exponential. That is,

it is extremely expensive to publish, say, one thousand copies of a given journal, plainly expensive to publish twenty-five hundred of the same journal, somewhat less expensive to publish ten thousand, substantially less expensive for twenty-five thousand, and so on. Reduce the economic base for a publication and you severely hamper its capacity to serve its audience, to meet its own purposes. If you want a publication of your own, give your editor a budget that will do the job, or the means to raise a budget. Otherwise, lower your expectations of the publication he can produce.

Final Word--for Now

I have gone on here longer than requested. One final word--a statistic that many budding writers request: What are my chances for publication?

For many reasons, some of them probably bordering on mysticism, we who are editors tend not to build speeches or articles around responses to that question, and I really don't know how many accurate rates of acceptance and rejection are computed from office to office nor what they are if they are computed. Somehow, "25 percent acceptance" is often mumbled or dropped as an aside or offered in a very subordinate clause when the topic comes up over cocktails or beer. I do know rather precisely that during the volume year that will end with the May 1974 issues, most of the one hundred sixty articles in The Reading Teacher and the Journal of Reading have resulted from unsolicited manuscripts. Your chances of publication in RT this year would have been one in five. Your chances for publication in JR would have been one in three. If I were an unpublished, aspiring author, no need to guess which of the two I would have aimed for this year--provided I

had something to say that someone in the audience for that journal wanted or needed to read.